

ex voto

heather h. yeung

2021

Quartz pebble taken from a well sacred to
St. Kieran [...] Ballaghmore

Science Museum Collections Object
A138032

Thresholds

In words you have placed together
water, stone, circle, binding
within them that which also surrounds.

Having cloistered your things
with some precision, you turn to observe
the tree. With the tree you choose
to disappear into the night's river.

(This, we hear it said, is the poet's story,
or is the story only the poet might tell.)

But there is no river here, nor tree. Only
air, controlled, a screen, the stone --

Caiseal

It is quite possible that the apprentice on command
passed the stone to the philosopher and quite possible
the philosopher did not take note, stood mute
on the threshold to observe a sky-framed blank.

He was, it transpired, waiting for the tree
to grow since only once the tree grew
would there be the possibility for a clearing,
his essential clearing of thought.

(I heard that asphodel grew as if lightning
quickenning the shade where there is Queen Anne's Lace,
bloodspots livid against white. I hear
the philosopher spits pebbles into the dark.)

Kenotaphion

Through the gasping rings out this question
in plainsong: Is it, then, some thing
which marks some other thing, or (there is a break
in which ablution occurs and the voice turns inside
to consult the book or scroll for the list of the possible)
some thing which marks

A grave

A cairn

A vow

A prayer

An offering?

(Not for a moment does the voice add to his murmurs
that it may be a pebble simply resting midst wildflowers
by the rubble of a chapel, in the lea of a great tree
where once there was also a well, now empty.)

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This is of all our finds from the site the hardest,
and unbroken may hold space for centuries.
Be silent. Palm it as if it were stone. Imagine
in both hands the chirality of the quartz,
what it is such a transfer of skin brings,
how in holding that it holds back what it is
or what were the possibilities of the vow,
the lie, the breathspace, the promise --

(the pebble,

should you know how it whispers, remembers:
Once I had been washed for a millennium by the waters.
Once I had forgotten so long loosed from a bedrock
what it was to be less than whole. Once, in a time before
and after *mac an tSaeir*, who drowned riversound
with the silver of his bell, she took me from the riverrun
and between her skin and mine let water transfer
dust to dust, added thus to water's memory.

I keep beneath my surface her benediction
keep nestled in the thought of wildflowers and ruins
a petition, for which I am cure or curse)

The stone's skin

once translated cannot stretch or flayed.

We could learn much from how it conducts itself
lets itself be washed, shaped, keeps watch
and still holds

Eiréil

dull thud
of stone on heart
of heart on stone
and around stone
water, reflected
clouds, the floating leaves

inside the stone
carillon of wildflowers

